

From: Dorothy Johnson – Realtor, Arlington, VA. Mobile: 571-233-7661. E-mail djtherealtor@yahoo.com 10/28/05

To: Antitrust Division, U.S. Department of Justice
Liberty Place, Suite 300
325 7th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Attention: Lee Quinn

Subject: Leveling the playing field in real estate sales

FTC/DOJ apparently assumes buyers in the 50 states in the union complain they over-pay for realtor services. It would seem the FTC/DOJ has leapt to the conclusion that we as realtors are charging unfairly for our time and expertise in our marketplaces. Little consideration has been given to the fact that all realtors, successful or not, well-paid or not, have hurdles to jump to be in our small businesses at all: Expenses, expenses that must be paid before the first transaction is ever completed. Education: singularly related to real estate contracts.

Many realtors would be glad to shed ourselves of the many hundreds of dollars charged to us by our boards of realtors annually. The boards are organizations that ensure we realtors learn about our regional contracts, about the properties we market, are constrained to ethical conduct in our trade, and update ourselves in knowledge of the legal ramifications of the negotiations we are performing when we help our clients buy or sell their homes and land.

Many of us would rather not pay our multiple listing service fees every quarter. Those hundreds of dollars we have to spend every year to maintain an organization that monitors what we put into the information stream, that fines us if we are not forthcoming in sharing our listings with other realtors and brokers, that fines us if we allow an unlicensed person to use our access tools, that reports us to our boards if we don't operate in an ethical way.

We are forced to spend hundreds of dollars to participate in a board regulated, controlled key-safe system that allows our fellow licensed, regulated realtors to bring prospective buyers to view our clients' homes, yet protects our clients' homes from unknown persons' entry.

Many of us would rather not pay errors and omissions insurance fees every year, prices for which have edged up annually since the companies who operate such benefits have a captive clientele.

We'd like to not have to pay for post-licensing education, which costs hundreds of dollars annually. If we don't update ourselves, we cannot maintain our board membership, and then we cannot participate in the cooperative that runs the multiple listing service; cooperatives that are paid for by us, not any government, not the public.

I'm sure we'd like to pass on all our expensive fees to the public, in the same way that power and communications operators are allowed to do.

Apparently someone at FTC/DOJ thinks every mechanic, hairdresser, farmer, administrative assistant, government employee, patent or other non-related-to-real-estate attorney, physician, dentist, retail service worker, food worker, factory worker, policeman, fireman, banker, insurance salesman and all the trades-people and other professionals I haven't touched on in this paragraph have devoted hundreds of hours learning about what real estate contracts do and don't do for/to them when they buy or sell their homes and land. In reality, it's so easy to sign away thousands of dollars when a contract is not understood, and there is no expert to explain the consequences of their signatures.

FTC/DOJ apparently wants them all to take a long walk on a short pier, diving into business they know little or nothing about, but that affects the largest investment they'll ever make in their lives.

Why not allow them to do your jobs? Share in your salaries? Arrest your opportunity for professional development? The public would probably love to take your salaries, and apparently you should want to share them, since you think it is okay to for realtors to give our small businesses away. We can surmise you'd like the public to be responsible for itself when one of them deals in or is dealt an unethical transaction consequence. That way they would have to see and pay attorneys for work to clean up the financial mess created. That way the DOJ case-loads would be increased hundreds-fold, making room for many more DOJ positions. In reality, a few internet entrepreneurs have been allowed to use the FTC/DOJ as tools in their attempt to wedge a foothold into real estate. I wonder how the public will get compensation from them when something goes awry.